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EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS IN GERMANY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY¹

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Experimental schools have influenced educational opinion.—The influence of small schools which have been organized to determine experimentally or to demonstrate practically the best methods of teaching has been an important factor in the history of education. In recent years the most notable example of such a school in America was the small laboratory school conducted by Professor John Dewey in connection with the Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago, beginning in 1896. The statement of the theory and work of this school in Dewey's *School and Society* has been one of the largest factors in recent years in stimulating a reconstruction of American thought about education. The model and experimental kindergartens conducted by Froebel after 1837 in Germany, and especially the schools of Pestalozzi at Burgdorf (1800-1804) and at Yverdon (1805-25) and of Fellenberg at Hofwyl (1806-1844) in Switzerland are other examples of the widespread influence which practical experimentation on a small scale may have. Before Pestalozzi organized his schools, there was a very important and influential movement organized in Germany to carry out some of the practical reforms in methods of teaching which had been suggested in Rousseau's *Emile*. These reforms were successfully realized in certain experimental schools, one of which (Salzman's) continued in operation for over a century. In this school, methods of instruction in connection with physical education, nature-study, school gardening, geographical and other

¹ In the last two volumes of the *Elementary School Teacher*, a number of articles appeared which were intended to illustrate a method of teaching the history of education by emphasizing school practice in its relation to social conditions. This is the eighth article in this series. A textbook entitled *A History of Modern Elementary Education*, constructed on these principles by the same author, will appear in the near future.

excursions, etc., were organized, probably more effectively than in any school since that time. The initial agitation for this movement, in connection with the work of Basedow, is ordinarily discussed in the histories of education, but its practical culmination in the work of German schools is generally neglected. In view of this fact, a brief description will be presented here, of the whole development which began primarily as a reaction against the narrow, sectarian, religious spirit which dominated the work of German elementary schools.

Agitation for non-sectarian, national education.—Johann Bernard Basedow (1723-90), the leading agitator in this movement, was a relatively mediocre thinker. But moved by fanatical opposition to the narrow-minded sectarianism which prevailed in German thought and education during the eighteenth century, he succeeded in uniting various secular interests by an appeal to public-spirited philanthropists to contribute funds which would furnish the means of opening and conducting schools on a reformed basis.

The same kind of attack as was made by Voltaire and Rousseau in France on the insincerity, the formalism, and other evils of the narrow, sectarian, religious spirit which prevailed, was carried on in Germany by a number of famous university professors. Basedow was one of the minor combatants in this clash of the orthodox and reform religious forces. As professor in a Danish academy he delivered lectures on theology. His lectures and certain publications in which he maintained a sort of natural religion and combated definitely many of the sectarian beliefs, got him into controversies with his colleagues and the public authorities. In the chief cities, Hamburg, Lübeck, and Altona, his writings were condemned in 1764 as containing religious beliefs contrary to the official catechism.

Appeal for subscriptions to provide secular education.—Tiring of religious controversy, and taking advantage of the interest in education which the appearance of Rousseau's *Emile* had created, Basedow issued in 1768 an *Address to Philanthropists and Men of Property on Schools and Studies and Their Influence on the Public Weal*. In this address he appealed for funds to enable him to prepare textbooks and to organize a school which would provide a

kind of education quite different from that given in the contemporary schools which were dominated by the orthodox clergy. There were two striking suggestions in this appeal; namely, (1) that the schools should be open to children of all religions, that it should be non-sectarian; (2) that a national council of education should be established which should have charge of all public instruction. In addition to these points, the appeal advocated a type of education including reform proposals taken from many sources; from Locke that education should be practical and playful, from Comenius that it should be based on a study of pictures, from Locke and Rousseau that it should include a large amount of physical exercise, etc.

Model books and an unsuccessful school.—The appeal met with unprecedented success and subscriptions flowed in from Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, from lodges of Free Masons, from the noble, the wealthy, and often the poor of all countries, who were interested primarily in the possibility of an education which would be free from the restrictions of sectarian narrowness. With the aid of these funds Basedow published a book on method, and a manual of information for use in the schools which was accompanied by a volume containing one hundred engraved pictures illustrative of the scientific and practical subjects discussed in the manual. These books enjoyed an astounding and flattering success, and were widely praised. In 1774 Basedow opened his model school, called the Philanthropinum, at Dessau. This was never very large or very successful, owing to Basedow's incompetence, his vicious habits, and his inability to get on with his assistants.

Philanthropinums became an educational fad.—The popularity of Basedow's publications resulted in a fad in Germany for the establishment of Philanthropinums. In the large cities, advertising signs stating "Here is a Philanthropinum" (Allhier ist ein Philanthropinum) were common. Many of these were ridiculous frauds, and were appropriately satirized by contemporary writers. On the other hand, some of these schools, in France and Switzerland as well as in Germany, were serious and successful attempts to carry out Basedow's plans, and they continued their intelligent experimentation down to the time of the influence of Pestalozzi.

A model secular school for children of means: Salzman.—The most successful of these schools conducted on Basedow's plans was that of Christian Salzman (1744–1811) who had been employed by Basedow for a short time. As he could not get along with Basedow, Salzman decided to establish a school of his own, and after careful investigation chose a site at Schnepenthal in Saxe-Gotha where he enjoyed the sympathetic assistance of the reigning family. He secured an ideal location for his school, on a farm near the Thuringian Forest, in a region with a great variety of physiographic features, including mountains, valleys and plains, lakes, and other possibilities for the study of nature and art.

The school was opened in 1784, and the first pupil was Karl Ritter, who later became the founder of modern geography. Salzman restricted the number of pupils, generally below sixty, in order to maintain the spirit of family life. The pupils arose with the sun, spent a few hours in agricultural work, gardening or tending domestic animals; had morning song in the chapel; breakfasted; spent about eight hours of the day in study, at least one in gymnastics, and several in recreation.

Principles of Rousseau successfully followed.—In addition to providing a certain amount of the traditional school work, many of the most important recommendations of Locke and Rousseau were carried out. Among these innovations were the following:

1. *Much physical training.*—A large amount of physical training, including swimming, skating, etc., was provided. Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths (1759–1839), “the grandfather of German gymnastics,” was instructor at the school for many years.

2. *Nature-study and lessons on things.*—The younger children spent three hours a day in the study of natural history and “lessons on things.” The instructor said, “Everyday I go with my children into my scientific laboratory and seek what is most worth studying. My laboratory is nature herself.”

3. *School gardening and manual training.*—Each child had his own garden plot for which he was responsible, thus giving training in practical agriculture. In his plan for such a school, Salzman announced that he would have workshops for manual training, but

it is not clear from the accounts that I have consulted that these were provided in actual practice.

4. *Many organized excursions.*—Excursions through the surrounding country were very common. Sometimes these were several days in length. On such occasions the pupils were organized as militia into companies with officers. The cavalry went on ahead to prepare quarters, then followed the baggage wagons, and finally came the infantry. The objective point was always of special geographical, industrial, historical, or scenic interest. The children slept at night on straw. On their return each pupil had to give a description of the excursion in which he told about places passed, adventures, plants, animals and minerals, industries and persons that they had noted. Local history was also emphasized. These descriptions were reviewed and corrected by the teachers.

5. *Religion approached via moral stories and nature-study.*—In the religious instruction, theological aspects such as were included in the ordinary catechism for little children were not taught by Salzmann until adolescence. Instead, moral tales which had been very carefully selected and prepared were first told the children and discussed with them as a means of developing ideals of worthy behavior. As the children grew older, these were followed by stories from the Bible, including the life of Christ, with emphasis on his character as an ideal man. Observations and discussions of nature supplemented this moral material, and not until the child was about twelve years of age was he introduced to the mysterious phases of religion. Even then such theological problems as are involved in the atonement, etc., were eliminated.

Prospered for over a century.—These phases of the work, namely, physical training, natural history, object teaching, school gardening, manual training, excursions, and non-theological religious training, show how thoroughly the idea of a secular education adapted to the understanding and needs of children had been carried out in practice by Salzmann. The institution prospered under his management to his death in 1811, after which it was continued in successful operation by his descendants, and celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary in 1884; an unusual example of an experimental school of long and happy life, surviving the founder. It served as a model

of the possibilities of a better education, anticipating in successful practice most of the reforms of Pestalozzi.

Secular schools for peasant children: Rochow.—The secular schools of Basedow and Salzman were intended primarily as boarding-schools for children of means. But it was not long before the reforms which they embodied were attempted to some extent in the ordinary elementary schools or *Volkschulen*. The first experiment in this direction was tried by Baron von Rochow (1734–1805) in schools which he established for the children of the peasants living on his estates in Prussia.

Distress of peasants to be relieved by education.—He had been an officer in the royal Prussian guard, but had retired on account of injuries and devoted his time to the efficient management of his country estates. He pitied the unfortunate peasants who often suffered from failure of crops, from pestilence, disease, and starvation. This was due in a considerable degree to their own stupidity, ignorance, and improvidence, which rendered them incapable of profiting by the assistance which Rochow offered. During a particularly bad winter it suddenly occurred to Rochow that the only way to improve conditions was by a better and more practical elementary education which would be the basis of more intelligent methods of farming and living. He immediately determined to provide such an education and as a first step wrote (1772) a book intended to aid teachers in carrying out his ideas of reform. The title, *A School Book for Country Children, or for Use in Village School*, is misleading, as it was not a book for children but for teachers. Rochow had been captivated by the early publications of Basedow and reproduced many of the latter's ideas.

Famous model schools for peasant children.—The next step was to open a model school on his farm at Reckahn. As teacher he installed a young man who had lived with him as secretary and musician for six years. The school soon had over seventy pupils and the novelty and success of the instruction attracted visitors from Germany and other countries. The Prussian government sent official investigators to examine the work. All reported very favorably. They were particularly impressed with the ease and skill with which the teacher taught lessons on things to a school of seventy-three children. These lessons were conducted by means

of Socratic questions which kept up a continual conversation between teacher and class. In all the instruction, every point was made clear and significant to the children, not by wordy explanations, but by connecting it with their real experience and discussing its application in the practical affairs of their lives.

Changed social life resulted from the new education.—Similar schools were opened by Rochow on his other estates and the influence was soon evident in the changed social life of the region. This change is described by Rochow in these words: "Today at Reckahn, the parents have lost their bestial stupidity, thanks to the influence of the children; they believe in the physicians, rather than the sayings of old women. The mortality has diminished on all my estates. Attendance at school, in summer as well as in winter, is now one of the things that the parents most prize and often they thank me with tears in their eyes."

To assist similar schools in other parts of Germany, Rochow prepared two popular reading-books: *The Peasant's Friend* (1773) and *The Children's Friend* (1775). The latter was very successful and was widely used as a textbook even as late as 1850. It consisted mainly of short instructional stories or discussions relating to agriculture, domestic affairs, and good citizenship. It also contained two rhymed prayers for little children.

Christian morality and national regeneration emphasized, not theology.—Although the main emphasis was on training for practical affairs, Rochow's school was not irreligious. He provided training in Christian morality, however, instead of theology, and criticized severely the dull memorizing of the catechism, which constituted the work of the ordinary elementary school. Consequently he aroused the opposition of the ecclesiastics who tried in vain to discredit his work.

Rochow did not rest satisfied with the local results of his endeavors, but published in 1779 a work entitled *The Improvement of the National Character by Means of Popular Schools* (*Volkschulen*) in which he advocated universal education for national reasons instead of merely religious or utilitarian reasons. "Without a national education," he said, "it is impossible to have a national character, and that is precisely what is lacking in Germany."

One of the most famous of the visitors to Rochow's school, a

very influential German professor, wrote: "To admire and praise the worthy founder of this school is not enough either for me or him. His work should be imitated not only in the Mark of Brandenburg, but also in the whole kingdom." How the king and his minister attempted to establish such a system of national secular schools, with special reference to peasant needs, remains to be described.

Rochow's suggestions coincided with king's plans.—The reforms represented by the efforts of Basedow, Salzman, and Rochow coincided in point of time as well as in spirit with the reforms which the Prussian kings were endeavoring to carry into effect especially in the rural schools. The efforts of Frederick the Great in this direction were particularly significant, and from 1771 on were guided to a considerable extent by a special admirer of Basedow and Rochow, namely, the minister Zedlitz, head of the Department of Lutheran Church and School Affairs. In 1763 Frederick issued his General Code of Regulations for Rural Schools, which made attendance of children compulsory from five to thirteen years of age; provided for inspection of the schools; and set up very definite standards for their improvement.

Effective enforcement of law opposed by public opinion.—In many places, this law could not be effectively enforced, owing to the numerous difficulties. There was opposition from existing teachers who were too ignorant to be eligible under the new requirements. There was opposition from the farmers who wished to use their children for work at home. There was opposition from the nobility who viewed the law with alarm, maintaining that "like cattle, the more stupid the peasant, the better will he accept his fate." In spite of this strenuous opposition, the king was very active in his endeavors to enforce the law which he supplemented by additional orders intended to decrease "the great stupidity of the peasant children."

The control of schools transferred from church to national council of education.—Another step in the development of the Prussian system was the creation of the central administrative board or *Oberschulcollegium*, to have direction of all the school affairs of the kingdom. Although this occurred in 1787, after the death of

Frederick the Great, it represented the culmination of the tendencies of his reign as well as the influence of the Basedow tendencies described in the first part of this paper.

Minister Zedlitz reiterated suggestion of Basedow.—The creation of this board was suggested by the king's minister Zedlitz, who had been made head of the Department of Lutheran Church and School Affairs by Frederick the Great in 1717. A similar suggestion for the creation of such a "national council of education" was contained, as we noticed, in Basedow's *Address to Philanthropists* issued in 1768. Zedlitz was an enthusiastic champion of Basedow's ideas and was especially influenced by Rochow's experiments in applying these ideas to the improvement of rural education. Zedlitz kept up an active correspondence with Rochow and consulted with him concerning many of his own (Zedlitz's) plans for national educational reforms. In 1788, Zedlitz wrote:

It is wrong to let the peasant grow up like an animal, having him memorize only a few things which are never explained to him. His instruction should include, besides religion, reading, writing, and arithmetic, also some experience with mechanics, the study of nature and dietetic rules, and some knowledge of government. Certain industrial activities like spinning and weaving should also be taught in the country schools.

In his suggestions to the king for the establishment of the *Oberschulcollegium*, Zedlitz said that such a board, with some degree of expert permanent membership, would be much more competent wisely to direct school affairs than were the consistories of the church under the direction of a king's minister as was the existing arrangement. Hence the establishment of the *Oberschulcollegium* represents the transition from church administration of the schools under state direction to expert state administration of the schools.

Zedlitz removed through conservative reaction of new king.—Zedlitz was made president of the new board, but he held his place under the new king for only two years. The latter was directly the opposite of Frederick the Great in his general attitudes. Instead of aiming to broaden and secularize the elementary schools, he maintained that their chief function should continue to be the teaching of religion, and that he would do his best to see that they were protected from the influence of rationalism, naturalism, and

deism. Owing to this reaction, no further progress was made in elementary education until the reforms at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But one other step in preparation for this latter development was to be taken.

Fundamental Prussian legal code (1794) defined schools as state institutions. Under Frederick the Great was begun the codification of the fundamental Prussian civil law, known as the *Allgemeine Landrecht*. The greatest scholars and jurists of Germany were engaged in this undertaking, the results of which were not published until 1794. Chapter twelve of the code was devoted to education. In it were formulated the culminating principles of the tendencies which had been developing during the century. Of the 129 sections in this chapter the following are especially significant.

1. Schools and universities are state institutions, charged with the instruction of youth in useful information and scientific knowledge.
2. Such institutions may be founded only with the knowledge and consent of the state.
9. All public schools and educational institutions are under the supervision of the state, and are at all times subject to its examination and inspection.

Basedow movement helped develop superior Prussian schools.—Thus a quarter of a century after Basedow issued his famous *Address to Philanthropists*, we find the Prussian schools established on the legal basis which made it possible for them to become the model schools of Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century; schools with which Horace Mann and all other American visitors compared American schools very unfavorably. The superiority of the Prussian schools is often attributed to their adoption of the Pestalozzian methods, and this was, indeed, an important factor. But it must be remembered that long before Pestalozzi's influence was felt, the Prussian kings were actively engaged in developing improved rural schools, and that the agitation conducted by Basedow, and the model schools of Salzman and Rochow, were important factors in showing the possibilities of improved methods, and in developing public sentiment in favor of a broader elementary education to remove the great stupidity and suffering of the peasants.